



Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) MISSISSIPPI

Q: What is the Healthy Forests Reserve Program?

- A: The HFRP is a voluntary program established for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forests ecosystems to:
- promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species;
 - improve biodiversity; and
 - enhance carbon sequestration.



Q: What are the eligibility requirements?

- A: To be eligible for enrollment, land must be private land or Tribal lands in Mississippi which will:
- restore, enhance, or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of a threatened or endangered species;
 - improve biological diversity; and
 - increase carbon sequestration

Q: What counties in Mississippi is the HFRP offered?

- A: The program will be offered in the following 14 counties:
- Covington
 - Forrest
 - George
 - Greene
 - Hancock
 - Harrison
 - Jackson
 - Jones
 - Lamar
 - Marion
 - Pearl River
 - Perry
 - Stone
 - Wayne



Q: What are the listed threatened and endangered species targeted for habitat and population recovery activities in Mississippi?

- A. Currently targeted are:
- Gopher frog;
 - Gopher tortoise; and
 - Black pine snake, a candidate for listing.



Q: Do these threatened and endangered species need to be present to qualify?

A: No, but applications that have existing populations verified by NRCS or USFWS of threatened and endangered species on them will be given the highest priority. Also, priority will be given to applications that:

- benefit more than one threatened and endangered species;
- are within close proximity of lands (or waterways) with existing populations of threatened and endangered species; and
- the landowner is willing to allow the creation of habitat for threatened and endangered species.



Q: Does the HFRP offer enrollment options?

A: The program offers three enrollment options:

- A 10-year cost share agreement; for which the landowner may receive 50 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices.
- A 30-year easement, for which the landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 75 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices.
- An easement of not more than 99-years, for which the landowners may receive 100 percent of the easement value and 100 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices.

Q: How are HFRP easements payments provided?

A: A participant's may request:

- lump sum payment; or
- annual payments (up to 10 years).

Q: Is there a limit on the number of acres a landowner may enroll in HFRP?

A: There is no national limitation on the amount of land that can be offered for the program. The total amount of land that can be enrolled nationally is limited each year. However, a state may establish an acreage enrollment limitation. Mississippi has no limitation on the amount of land that can be offered for the 2008 sign-up which is available March 17, through April 4, 2008.

Q: How do landowners apply for the program?

A: Landowners may obtain HFRP applications at their local USDA Service Center NRCS office or conservation district office. Applications for HFRP will be evaluated periodically.



Q: What are a participant's requirements under a HFRP easement?

A: When a landowner enrolls in one of the HFRP easements options, a landowner shall grant an easement to the United States. The easement shall require:

- That the easement area is maintained in accordance with HFRP goals and objectives for duration of the term of the easement including the restoration, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and management of habitat for listed species within a forest ecosystem's functions and values.
- For the duration of its term, the easement shall require, at a minimum, that the landowner, and the landowner's heirs, successors and assigns, shall cooperate in the restoration, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and management of the land in accordance with the easement and with the terms of the HFRP restoration plan.
- The easement shall grant to the United States, through the NRCS:
 1. A right of access to the easement area;
 2. The right to permit compatible uses of the easement area, which may include such activities as hunting and fishing, or managed timber harvest, if such use is consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the purposes for which the easement was established;
 3. The right to determine compatible uses on the easement area and specify the amount, method, timing, intensity and duration of the compatible use;
 4. The rights, title and interest to the easement area as specified in the conservation easement deed; and
 5. The right to perform restoration, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and management activities on the easement area.
- The landowner shall convey title to the easement which is acceptable to the NRCS.
- The landowner shall warrant that the easement granted to the United States is superior to the rights of all others, except for exceptions to the title which are deemed acceptable by NRCS.

Q: Does the applicant need to hire a closing agent, appraiser, surveyor, or lawyer?

A: No. NRCS makes arrangements for these services.

Q: Who controls access to lands enrolled in a HFRP easement?

A: The landowner retains complete control of access. However, NRCS retains access rights to the easement area for the purposes of enforcing the easement deed and carrying out restoration, protection, enhancement, management, and monitoring activities.



Randy Browning

Q: How are applications selected for HFRP?

A: Applications are selected according to criteria developed at the state level within broad national guidelines.

Q: Where did the HFRP come from?

A: The HFRP was signed into law as part of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. The program is authorized to be carried out from 2004 through 2008.

Q: How many acres in the United States will be allowed into the program?

A: The HFRP is authorized to enroll up to two million acres through 2008.

Q: Where is HFRP available?

A: The program is a pilot program only available in Mississippi and Minnesota in 2008.

Q: If I have historic forestland that has been converted to cropland, would it be eligible for HFRP?

A: Yes, if the cropland offered met the ranking criteria for:

- promoting the recovery of threatened and endangered species;
- improving biodiversity; and
- enhancing carbon sequestration

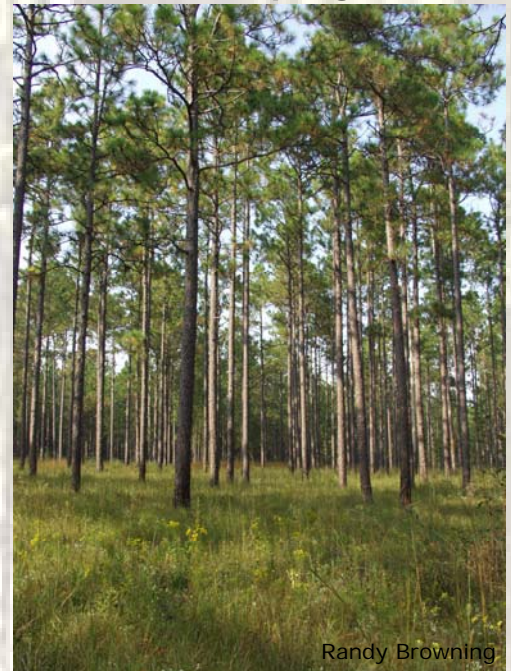
Q: Are wildlife food plots allowed in HFRP?

A: Wildlife food plots are allowed in the program, but will only be located where planned in the HFRP restoration plan and cannot be harvested for seed, grain, hay or fodder. Food plots are limited to native plant species and no more than 5% of the total easement area and must have an approved HFRP Compatible Use.

Q: What conservation practices are eligible for financial assistance under HFRP?

A: The conservation practices available for financial assistance under HFRP are:

- Prescribed Burning
- Firebreak
- Forest Site Preparation
- Pest Management
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- Shallow Water Management for Wildlife
- Forest Harvest Trails and Landings



Randy Browning



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Q: Does land enrolled in the HFRP have to have a restoration plan?

A: Yes, the approved management activities must be described in the HFRP restoration plan to insure program objectives are achieved.

Q: What is in the restoration plan?

A: A restoration plan must have practices necessary to restore and enhance habitat for species listed as threatened or endangered or are candidates for the threatened or endangered list.

Q: Are lands under a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract eligible for HFRP funding?

A: They are not eligible during the term of the CRP contract.

Q: How is easement value determined?

A: Easement values generally are determined by a professional appraisal of the difference in the appraised fair market value of the larger parcel before the easement is in place and the appraised market value of the larger parcel after the easement is in place.

Q: Will Landowner Protections be made available in the program?

A: Yes. NRCS will provide technical assistance to the HFRP participant to enter into a Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) with FWS or NMFS or similar assurances will be made available to landowners enrolled in the HFRP who agree, for a specified period, to restore or improve their land for threatened or endangered species habitat. In exchange, they avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land protected under the Endangered Species Act.



Q: What are the advantages of having Landowner Protections?

A: The basic idea behind landowner protections is that people who do good deeds shouldn't be punished for doing them. Safe harbor or safe harbor-like agreements assure landowners that if they restore or enhance habitat, they won't incur any new restrictions if their actions result in a federally protected species taking up residence or increasing its population size on their land. The protections are founded upon a baseline population or habitat amount that is determined to exist when the HFRP agreement or easement begins.

Baselines can be equal to zero if it is so determined by NRCS and USFWS.

